Proposal to Establish an Academic Misconduct Review Committee in the Faculty of Engineering

Mar. 2, 2011

1. Background

In November 2009, the Faculty of Engineering's Committee on Undergraduate Studies (CUGS) established a Committee on Academic Integrity\(^1\). The focus of this committee is to develop practices and processes to establish a strong culture of academic integrity within the undergraduate programs of the Faculty of Engineering.

In the winter of 2010, the committee undertook a survey to determine the current student perspective on the nature of academic misconduct within the Faculty of Engineering. The results of this survey identified a clear belief in the importance of academic integrity within the Engineering student body, from Engineering One up to Term 8. Further, in April 2010, the committee participated in the PEGNL seminar on professional ethics in order to obtain feedback from graduating students on developing a culture of integrity.

In addition to student feedback, the committee also undertook to review the approaches taken at other institutions. For example, a wealth of information from other programs is available from the Centre for Academic Integrity at [www.academicintegrity.org](http://www.academicintegrity.org).

One conclusion to be drawn, from the committee's research and feedback from students, is that developing a fair, consistent process to review and respond to cases of academic misconduct is an important aspect of promoting a culture of academic integrity.

For this reason, the Committee on Academic Integrity is now proposing the establishment of an Academic Misconduct Review (AMR) Committee. As part of the establishment of this committee, a new process must be adopted by the Faculty for dealing with cases of academic misconduct. The new process is defined to be consistent with the university regulations regarding academic misconduct (outlined in Section 5.11 in the University Calendar); however, in the unexpected circumstance where a conflict arises between the university regulations and the Faculty process, the university regulations will take precedence.

2. Faculty Process for Academic Misconduct

(a) Existing University Process

In Section 5.11 of the 2010-2011 University Calendar, the university regulations define academic misconduct and provide procedures to deal with identified cases. For convenience in our discussion, we assume that, in the case of an incident of academic misconduct, the accuser is a course instructor and the accused is an undergraduate student. However, the accuser may generally be a faculty member, staff member, or student and accusations may be made in many different contexts. See Section 5.11.4 of the 2010-2011 University Calendar for a listing of academic offences.

\(^{1}\) The Committee on Academic Integrity was initially established as an ad hoc committee and then made permanent in May 2010. The committee is composed of 7 members: the Associate Dean (Undergraduate Studies), one Faculty Member, the Academic Program Manager, and 4 students (one senior and one junior student from each of Engineering Student Societies A and B).
In the university regulations, there are essentially three levels of resolution: (1) direct agreement between parties, (2) unit (Faculty) level resolution involving the participation of the unit head (Associate Dean), and (3) formal procedures of the Senate Committee on Undergraduate Studies (SCUGS). The corresponding sections of the university regulations are found in (1) Section 5.11.3, (2) Section 5.11.5, and (3) Section 5.11.6, respectively.

(b) Proposed New Faculty Process

The new process defined by the Faculty is intended to be consistent with the university's existing regulations. However, in the unexpected circumstance where a conflict arises between the university regulations and the Faculty processes, the university regulations will take precedence.

The main feature of the new process is the creation of a new Faculty committee, referred to as the Academic Misconduct Review (AMR) Committee. Involvement of the AMR Committee will occur when either the accuser (e.g., course instructor) or the Associate Dean wishes to obtain advice from the committee. Although it is hoped that most instructors will take the advantage of seeking the AMR Committee's advice, it is the prerogative of an accuser to not seek advice directly from the committee. Despite its voluntary nature, it is hoped that the creation of the AMR Committee will provide a mechanism for the resolution of academic misconduct cases which emphasizes the seriousness of all academic offences and ensures a more fair and consistent resolution of cases of academic misconduct.

With the adoption of this proposal, in cases of academic misconduct, from minor infractions to serious offences, the Faculty of Engineering will encourage (but not require) instructors to seek the advice of the AMR Committee. If the instructor does not wish to involve the AMR Committee, they may proceed with direct resolution as detailed in Section 5.11.3 of the university regulations. However, if they choose to seek advice from the AMR Committee, as a first step, the instructor will discuss the offence with the student and indicate the desire to involve the AMR Committee for advice in a resolution. Before proceeding, the instructor must then obtain a response from the student indicating their acceptance of the involvement of the AMR Committee. Two directions may be followed based on the student's response:

(i) The student does not agree to the involvement of the AMR Committee.
The instructor may proceed with a direct resolution as per the university regulations (Section 5.11.3) or may forward the case to the Associate Dean to seek resolution at the Faculty level (Section 5.11.5). In either case, resolution of the offence shall proceed in accordance with the university regulations.

(ii) The student agrees to the involvement of the AMR Committee.
By involving the AMR Committee, the parties effectively agree to seek a Faculty level resolution as outlined in Section 5.11.5 of the regulations. In this case, prior to any agreed upon resolution between the instructor and student, the details of the circumstance will be reported to the Associate Dean (Undergraduate Studies) who will forward the information to the AMR Committee with the student name removed. The details provided should include the circumstances of the misconduct, appropriate course information (e.g., course outline), and previous confirmed incidents of academic misconduct in which the student was involved. The Associate Dean will meet with the instructor and student to clarify the circumstances surrounding the offence and review the procedures for resolution.

The role of the AMR Committee will be to review the case and to recommend an appropriate penalty, or range of penalties, which is consistent with penalties given in similar cases within the Faculty of Engineering. The AMR Committee will normally review the case and provide a recommendation within two weeks of the offence being reported to the Associate Dean. This recommendation will be presented to the instructor and the student at a follow-up meeting with the Associate Dean.
In order to be consistent with university regulations, the AMR Committee recommendation cannot be binding on the instructor or student. As per Section 5.11.5, the instructor and student will discuss the proposed penalty at a private meeting arranged by the Associate Dean. Subsequently, if a resolution is not accepted by both parties, as per Section 5.11.5, the Associate Dean will make further attempts to resolve the case. In any case, a final adopted resolution must be acceptable to the Associate Dean. Cases where resolution is not achieved at the Faculty level are passed on to the SCUGS level as described in the university regulations (Section 5.11.6).

Note that, even when the instructor does not recommend or the student does not agree to the involvement of the AMR Committee in directly resolving a case, the Associate Dean may seek advice from the committee (with appropriate anonymization of the names and identifying details) regarding specific cases.

It should also be noted that, in ALL circumstances of academic misconduct, even those resolved directly between just the instructor and student, the details of the case MUST be reported to the Associate Dean, who may judge that the case requires resolution at the Faculty level (as per Section 5.11.5) or that the case must be referred to the Senate Committee on Undergraduate Studies (as per Section 5.11.6). ¹

The disposition of documentation in cases of academic misconduct is described in Section 5.11.8 of the university general regulations. However, the Associate Dean will keep a summary of confirmed cases of academic misconduct and this information may be used, by either the Associate Dean or the AMR Committee, in the assignment of a penalty to a student who is found to have committed a second offence. This summary information will include the student name, student number, details of the case, and the penalty applied. Any summary information provided to the AMR Committee will be anonymized.

The student will meet with the Associate Dean and instructor prior to the involvement of the AMR Committee and subsequently when the AMR Committee's recommendation is available. As well, following the 2nd meeting involving the Associate Dean, the instructor and student will meet privately to discuss the resolution. If the student requests to meet directly with the AMR Committee, they will be allowed to do so before the committee finalizes its recommendation. (In such cases, the student is obviously waiving their privilege of anonymity.) The AMR Committee may request to meet individually with either the instructor or the student. Neither the instructor nor the student are required to attend such a meeting.

The normal timeline for the resolution of an academic offence is summarized below:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tr>
<td>As soon as possible following discovery of offence</td>
<td>Offence reported to Associate Dean in writing.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Within 1 week of report to Associate Dean</td>
<td>Associate Dean meets with instructor and student to clarify incident, review procedures of resolution, and establish time for follow-up meeting.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Within 2 weeks of report to Associate Dean</td>
<td>Incident reviewed in meeting of the AMR Committee. AMR Committee provides recommendation to instructor.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Between 2 to 3 weeks following report to Associate Dean</td>
<td>Follow-up meeting of Associate Dean, instructor, and student.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Subsequent to follow-up meeting</td>
<td>Report back to Associate Dean from instructor and further resolution undertaken if necessary.</td>
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² In fact, the current university regulations state that all academic offences must be reported to the unit head (i.e., Associate Dean), although it appears that, in Engineering, some minor cases that are handled directly by the instructor are not reported.
3. Establishment of Academic Misconduct Review Committee

(a) Mandate

The Academic Misconduct Review Committee will have the following mandate:

(1) The committee shall adhere to the Faculty guidelines for penalties associated with academic misconduct developed by the Committee on Academic Integrity and approved by the Faculty's Committee on Undergraduate Studies.

(2) Beginning in fall 2011, the committee shall provide, in a timely manner, recommendations to instructors or the Associate Dean for penalties in cases of academic misconduct within the Faculty of Engineering. These recommendations should be fair to the student, while ensuring that the Faculty is upholding the highest standards of academic integrity. The recommendations must be consistent with the university regulations.

(3) The committee shall have access to a summary of cases of academic misconduct that will be kept in the Associate Dean's office. Prior offences by a student will be an important consideration in the committee's recommendation.

(4) The parties involved in all cases reported to the committee shall remain confidential, except when it is necessary to reveal details for the purposes of university processes external to the AMR committee or when a student waives the privilege of anonymity by requesting to meet with the committee.

(5) Each case discussed will be summarized and reported back to CUGS, including the recommendation of the committee and the final resolution. All parties involved in the incident will be referred to anonymously in this summary.

(6) The committee will frequently review its practices and guidelines and present to CUGS for approval, any significant amendments required to its guidelines.

(7) The committee will report to the Committee on Academic Integrity any recommendations which it believes might improve the culture of academic integrity if adopted by the Faculty.

(b) Composition

The Academic Misconduct Review Committee will need to respond in a timely way to cases which arise. For this reason it is desirable to keep the number of committee members small. Student involvement on the committee is crucial. The recommended composition for the committee is:

- One Faculty member appointed by CUGS (Chair of the Committee)
- Associate Dean (Undergraduate Studies)
- One student representative appointed by Engineering Student Society in term

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